

The Strange Sad Tale of Victor Maymudes

by Peter Stone Brown

Another Side of Bob Dylan

by Victor Maymudes

Co-written and edited by Jacob Maymudes

St. Martin's Press

Victor Maymudes was Bob Dylan's road manager in the 1960s, and filled a similar role more than 20 years later from the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s. He was friend, possibly confidante, and chess partner.

Maymudes ended his relationship with Dylan in 1997, and three years later signed a book deal, and started recording his memoirs on tape. However he died suddenly of a stroke the following year leaving only the tapes, and very little on paper. More than a decade later his son Jacob decided to finish the book for him, perhaps in hopes of preserving his father's legacy but also to find out who the man was who was absent during much of his childhood. Initially Jacob announced his intentions by putting up a couple of the tapes on youtube that disappeared within a day. This was followed by an unsuccessful Kickstarter campaign. Somewhere along the line St. Martin's Press, the same publisher Maymudes originally signed with decided to publish the book.

I listened to a couple of those tapes on youtube and they were for the most part incomprehensible stoned ramblings where Maymudes' memory often clashed with the actual timeline of events.

Maymudes' parents were American Jewish Communists, who were born in Poland, moved to New York and eventually relocated to Los Angeles. At one point, his father was regional editor of the Yiddish paper, *The Morning Freiheit*. In 1955, Victor and Herb Cohen who a decade later would manage Frank Zappa, Tom Waits and several others opened the Unicorn Coffee shop in Los Angeles. This was Victor's entrance into the music business. After splitting with Cohen he would manage and book people like Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and beat poet/comic Hugh Romney (eventually known as Wavy Gravy). Elliott suggested he go to New York and meet Bob Dylan, which he did in 1961. Apparently he and Dylan had an instantaneous connection.

Rolling Stone and some of the less savory members of the British press have referred to this book as a tell all. There is very little in the book to keep even the most rabid Dylan fan salivating. After a brief introduction that delves into Victor's history, the book is edited

transcriptions of Maymudes' tapes followed by his son commenting and occasionally adding to what went on.

One of the problems with the book is Maymudes' timeline of events isn't always accurate and at times doesn't add up. For instance he talks about producing Joan Baez' first major concert in 1962. According to Baez' official website her first national tour was in 1961. By 1962, she'd released two studio albums and a live album came out that year. Maymudes also claims that Dylan's manager Albert Grossman stole a Dylan concert Maymudes had booked in one the smaller halls at Carnegie Hall and handed it off to manager/promoter Harold Leventhal in 1962. If so, the show never happened, and if he's confusing it with the concert Israel G. Young of the Folklore Center store in Greenwich Village presented at Carnegie Chapter Hall in 1961, we'll never know. Much later in the book Maymudes states that Dylan attended the Selma Alabama March in the spring of 1965. Didn't happen. Maymudes is confusing it with a 1963 voter registration rally in Greenwood Mississippi Dylan performed at along with Pete Seeger and Theo Bikel.

In 1964, Maymudes was hired as Dylan's road manager on a somewhat crazed concert tour across the US in Dylan's brand new Ford station wagon on which they were accompanied by singer Paul Clayton and oddly enough a journalist named Pete Karman. This trip which included a stop in Hazard, Kentucky to drop off clothing for striking miners and a not exactly successful visit to Carl Sandberg in North Carolina, has been written about in previous Dylan biographies. Even though this time it's a firsthand account, there is little new of interest added.

Dylan is basically presented as an extreme introvert, occasionally prone to flying into outbursts of rage over matters of privacy or when something doesn't meet his expectations. Maymudes casts himself as protector, creating environments where Dylan could write, decision maker and quick thinker, especially in terms of getting out of potentially sticky situations. During a vacation trip to Greece later in 1964, Maymudes would roam the countryside while Dylan stayed in his room writing what turned out to be his fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. But even here, Maymudes memory is confused as he has the album being recorded in August 1964, the month it was released, when it was actually recorded in one long session two months before.

Maymudes apparently wasn't around in 1965, a pivotal year for Dylan, and the book does not address why. The result is there is no inside account of Dylan's move to rock and roll.

Maymudes was back for Dylan's explosive 1966 world tour with The Hawks (who would become The Band). However the only story about the tour (one of the craziest in the history of rock and roll) is when an unnamed roadie is busted for drugs in an unnamed country resulting in everyone's hotel room including Dylan's being searched.

Maymudes spends a bit of time talking about this particular roadie was really good at attracting women for after the show. Maymudes was upset when Grossman fired the roadie and sent him back to the states. But there's nothing about the guys in the band, nothing about the booing and the controversy Dylan generated in every country he went to, and nothing about Dylan being totally wasted and drained by the end of the tour. Maymudes was apparently there when Dylan crashed his bike which he claims took place in Albert Grossman's driveway in Bearsville, New York. Whether Maymudes' account is more valid and any of the other accounts is hard to say. After an argument with Albert Grossman, Maymudes left Woodstock and headed to the west coast.

The next part of the book is about Maymudes' involvement in the Bohemian scene in and around Santa Fe, where he eventually entered into the construction and real estate business. At some point he accompanies Dennis Hopper to Peru to scout locations for Hopper's doomed *The Last Movie*. Various famous people (Maymudes is an inveterate name dropper) including the Merry Pranksters, Allen Ginsberg and various actors and actresses come and go, but Maymudes fails to make the scene come alive. There are a couple of brief encounters with Dylan during this time.

In 1987, his marriage broken up, his attempts at developing real estate a failure, and on the brink of financial disaster, Maymudes asks Dylan for a job. Dylan, about to embark on a foreign tour with Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers hires him even though he had a full road crew. At this point, perhaps because these events are closer in Maymudes' memory, the book becomes a bit more vibrant. During this part there is a feeling of what traveling was like and at times being backstage was like. Maymudes convinced Dylan he should have his own tour bus and inadvertently something is revealed: Dylan was actually concerned about alienating the members of his band by having his own bus. Maymudes goes into great detail about how he found and designed the bus that there's a chapter (apparently actually written, not dictated) that was supposed to be from the point of view of the bus, except it's not. During this we find out that even Bob Dylan can get lost looking for hotels (was there no CB radio?), the bus breaks down, and other adventures. But again key things are missing. For instance on the '89 tour at the first two stops, a four nights at the

Beacon in New York City, and two nights at the Tower Theater (just outside Philly), at the final show of each stand, Dylan did something he never did before or since. Taking an extended harp solo at the end of "Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat," jumps into the audience, continues to play the harp, makes his way to a side door and out of the theater. To appreciate the impact of this, Dylan's band usually set up fairly far back on the stage. This book should have had the story behind it, but not a word.

Ultimately, there just isn't that much revealed about Bob Dylan that hasn't already been out there in one way or another. In describing the scene backstage at Dylan's 30th Anniversary tribute concert at Madison Square Garden, where there were innumerable heavy duty music stars, you get the impression that Dylan has so many people around him who think they know what he wants, that he never gets to do what he really wants.

While Jacob Maymudes' interjections are usually well-written and sometimes painfully honest as he discovers the good and bad sides of his father's personality, as well as his account being a teenager on tour briefly with Dylan, what Victor Maymudes needed was a writer who could draw the interesting (not necessarily scandalous) stories out of him and challenge him when his memory didn't jibe with facts. As close as Victor Maymudes was to Bob Dylan, if you read this book to find out what Bob Dylan thinks about anything, that answer remains as elusive as ever.